ROBERT G. BECKEL EXIT INTERVIEW

[Side 1]

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Okay, this is an interview with Bob Beckel on December 3, 1980, 11:25 AM, Room One, 88-1/2 Executive Office Building. The interviewer is David Alsobrook, President's Writer Staff.

Let's see. Bob, if you would just speak at your normal levels, so I can check -- I realize that [inaudible] pick that up right. Let me tell you a little bit --

Question number one, how'd you end up working in the Carter White House?

BOB BECKEL: Well, I started as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations at State. A friend of mine was named Assistant Secretary, Doug Bennett. And I was, prior to that, doing the political selling work. And Bennett asked me to come down to be his deputy to handle the Panama Canal Treaties. That was in March of '77, and I had not worked on the Carter campaign prior; a number of campaigns that overlapped with his, but none of his campaign. The Panama Canal Treaties at that point were still in negotiation. Sol Linowitz had just been brought on to help negotiate with Bunker. And at that point, it appeared that it was imminent that it was going to be -- that the treaty would be finished within a matter of weeks or a few months.

I went in to work to take the place of [indiscernible] Larry [Lawrence A.] Pezzullo, who is now Ambassador to Nicaragua, who had been handling the Panama Canal treaty work with Congress up until that point. So I went to work as a Deputy to Bennett doing almost exclusively the Panama Canal treaties. And then as time went along, the treaties were delayed in ratification. We spent a good deal of planning time between the State Department and Frank Moore's office. And one of the things that became apparent was that there was nobody earlier who had had a position dealing exclusively in the foreign policy and defense fields. And as I began to commute back and forth on almost a regular basis, it became clear that it probably would be sensible for me to come over here and take a position.

Bob Thompson, who was the Senate liaison, was handling the Panama Canal treaties for Moore's office, but that and a number of other things. And I began to work with Thompson more and more closely. And then in December of '77, Frank and I began discussions about opening a new position here, Congressional Liaison, House and Senate, Defense and Foreign Policy. The Congressional Relations office had been divided before that between four or five people handling the House and two handling the Senate. Nobody had responsibility for the both, so this was a new position that Frank cleared with the President and with Brzezinski, and then in January, I came over full-time in a position of Special Assistant.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Okay, could you focus a little bit now about the Panama Canal treaties, specifically? You know, your work with them on the Hill and so on and the various other people you worked with as the process went along?

BOB BECKEL: When we began the ratification process -- prior to the Treaties being approved, which were finally initialed in August, I believe, of '77, we had responsibility at the State Department for Congressional relations and getting the Senate prepared for it. We knew it was as much a domestic and political issue as it was a foreign policy issue, which was one of the reasons that I was given responsibility for it. I knew a lot of people in the Senate. We didn't -- I didn't have any foreign policy background except for a stint in the Peace Corps, but we decided this thing was -- on its merits, it was a salable item. There was no question about it. And if we had had a closed vote in the Senate to see if it's valid, we would've gotten 85 votes for the thing. Only the extreme right wing was opposed. But given the fact that it was such a potentially dangerous political issue and since Reagan -- if you remember Reagan in '76 against Ford and it was Reagan standing up in New Hampshire, when he mentioned it as an aside, the whole room burst out into cheers, so it was clear it was going to be a tough political issue. So my responsibility was to coordinate it from the State Department. Some contact with the White House [indiscernible]. What we did was to develop political contacts on the Hill with friends of the Carters, most particular, Senator Huddleston, early on.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Kentucky.

BOB BECKEL: Kentucky. And his aide, Ed Groves, who became a significant figure in all this, and Bob Byrd, West Virginia Majority Leader. Hoyt Purvis, who's now at WJ School, Austin, was his contact person. Baker, who's -- Howard Baker, Minority Leader, who had -- [indiscernible] Montgomery was his person. And Fritz Hollings, who became really -- in South Carolina who became [indiscernible] because of his conservative credentials. He was a firm believer in the treaty, who incidentally ultimately became my biggest opponent in SALT and [indiscernible]. Those were the few workers on the Hill. [Bennett] kept his fingers in the Congressional part of it from the State Department standpoint and in conjunction with Vance and Warren Christopher].

As Carter [indiscernible] Bennett getting more involved in other things, and so I took over almost all the coordination within the State Department. And the key person in the administration, who I think probably more than any other is responsible for the treaty, was Christopher, and he and I began to work very closely together.

We then developed a program of Congressional consultation on the theory that if they knew about it and knew all the details of the treaty and knew about the negotiations as they went along, they wouldn't be surprised, and a great deal of criticism about telling Congress about treaties and other foreign policy initiatives after the fact. So we decided to go on the extensive briefing procedure, and in that regard, we used both Bunker -- Ellsworth Bunker and Sol Linowitz extensively to go up on the Hill and do briefings. We coordinated [indiscernible] through Byrd's office, and all through the spring, we spent just endless hours taking Bunker and Linowitz and David Jones, the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

and others up to the Hill to sit down with Senators one on one, and we did consultations with their staffs at the staff level for the White House and the State Department and just did a continual briefing process all through the spring and early summer.

We began [to find] in the course of all that, and one of the reasons, we wanted to probe and find out where we were, how many votes we really had. And it was pretty clear to us that we were significantly shy of votes we needed to get, and it was also imperative -- we had to key in on people that were imperative for us to get over immediately, and the two obvious were Byrd and Baker, and particularly Baker. We figured Byrd would eventually come along. He played his cards pretty well, as he usually does. He said he wanted to look at it carefully and all that. But Byrd began to fight early on to it, and he wanted to sort of be the guy that led this thing through the Senate, and [indiscernible] he did, but Baker was the key guy we were after. We spent an awful lot of time with him.

And then the interesting thing about it was when we kept waiting, we expected the treaties to be ratified or to be initialed. June was the last possible day we'd have, and then it went all through June, and we got caught up on the economic package. And essentially what happened was that the Panamanians or somebody else would give you the details of the substitute treaties. When we had it, the Panamanians were holding out for a fairly big payoff. That was our biggest problem on the Hill at that point.

Subsequently, we had a lot of other political problems, but to give away the Panama Canal -- it was an act of politics at that time-- and pay for it at the same time: it was something that just wasn't going to [work]. And so we had to embark on a series of briefings, go back to all these people all over again and say, "By the way, we've told you all about the terms of the treaty. Now we've got to tell you what it's going to cost us."

And I remember -- I remember one day I was talking with Hollings, and he said -- and I thought Hollings was pretty strong for us. He hadn't spoken publicly yet because he hadn't seen the treaties before and all that. He was there and doing a lot of background work for us. Hollings' theory was if you could explain the damned thing, you could sell it, and he was going to be the point guy to sell it to his constituents. Incidentally, he did, and it was an interesting to thing to have that. Hollings did a series of newsletters to the people of South Carolina explaining the Panama Canal treaty, and I'll be damned if he didn't pull it off. I mean, not only did they support it, they were enthusiastic about it.

So in any event, Hollings said, "[Inaudible]. You just cannot ask us to do that." And I said, "Well, we're going to have to." So what we did was we worked out an arrangement that whatever the package was, it would not require any new appropriations from the Congress. And that was the key to it. We didn't have to go up and ask for Panama Canal monies to pay for the Canal. What we did was -- we did -- Linowitz and the rest -- was to take available funds, Eximbank loans, economic taxes. We brought the Treasury into it. Cooper was doing that from State, who was the guy who's in charge of economic affairs at the State Department, and Tony Solomon at the Treasury handled the negotiations on that. Linowitz, Bunker, and the Panamanians came here and spent days negotiating a package which wouldn't require appropriations. That probably was one of the most

significant boosts we got because they came back to us with a package, the Panamanians bought it, and we had a treaty that wasn't going to cost us money.

So by the time the treaty was finally initialed in Panama, it was August, and the Senate was on vacation. And I remember we spent time one day over here all through the night, Dan Tate and Thompson and Frank Moore and I, trying to figure out how we're going to let members of the Senate know. After we'd spent all this time giving them detailed briefings on the treaties, we sure as hell didn't want to have to read about it in the paper the next day. But they're all out of town. They're scattered all over the damned world, literally. So we decided the best course of action was to draft a telegram from the President, and the telegram told them that [indiscernible]. So the telegram essentially said -- and this copy was available in my files and others -- but the telegram said that the President was going to initial these treaties tomorrow. We think they're in the best interest of the country. And I ask you to keep your powder dry, essentially. Don't make [indiscernible] one way or another until you've had a chance to see it.

That probably was one of the most important decisions, political decisions, we made, and if I'm right, I think Doug Bennett deserves credit for coming up with that idea. But essentially what it did was put it in the hands of these guys who wanted to be with us but were trying to figure out a political way to do it. And I think about people that, you know, ranged the whole gamut, guys like Hatfield in Montana and Bellman of Oklahoma and others that wanted to be [indiscernible]. These guys needed persuading-- here's a letter, a telegraph, from the President. He asked me to not make a commitment on this thing one way or another. So I'm going to abide by what he asked me to do. I'm going to wait, look, and see before I make a decision. And I'll use that thing as an excuse to hold off, which bought us time, which was what we needed.

Suffice it -- and then we called them all. We found some of them in Russia, some were in Japan, all over the place. We had people -- Christopher was calling, Vance was calling, Brown was calling, the President was calling, the Vice President was calling, we were calling. And the instant reaction was, well, I guess it's finally here. It was like everybody was sort of hoping it was going to go away, it never was going to happen, but it was finally there. And then it started, and then the brouhaha just started. It was -- didn't take but 12 hours for the right wing to rise up all over the country. And there was a Save the Canal group started and all kinds of things.

That began our significant public relations problem by mid-summer. At that point, Jordan decided, and Lane Butler was our contact in the hands-offs at that point, that we had to go on the offensive, the public relations offensive. And that -- I don't believe [Anne] Wexler was here at that point. I don't remember. Maybe she was. I wonder who took on that original -- there was a group put together that was to be responsible for selling the treaty to the public and for bringing in major personalities around the country to support the treaty. The biggest catch to it, John Wayne and Westmoreland. And I believe that that was started by -- Phil Wise may have been the person who was originally responsible for coordinating that activity, and then I think Wexler took over. She came in at the end. But that's something to look into because that was kind of a fascinating story

for selling that thing out in the country. And we blocked endless groups. And one of the things we'd asked for from the Congressional side was that the senators be allowed to pick as many members of --

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Was George Moffat involved?

BOB BECKEL: Yes, yes, that's right. Now, George -- George was a key person at that point. He was working for Butler. Butler essentially gave him the responsibility for handling and coordinating for Jordan and the political operation of the White House in that group. Moffat originally was with a group called Americans for SALT, and he came over from Americans for SALT, and I don't remember who the Congressmen were, but they had some money [inaudible], and they were the independent group that we worked with very closely. In fact, we were always accused by the right wing on the Hill as having clandestinely funded that group to promote SALT, which was not the case. We did up and raise some money.

But we asked that the Senators be allowed to invite [indiscernible] to the White House, members of their constituents who were, say, significant public opinion leaders or political people in their states. That probably was the second major innovation that we developed that's subsequently been used as a model for most of the major legislative efforts that the Carter White House undertook, both foreign policy and domestic. And that was something that Wexler's people became kind of expert at, the White House briefing. And it was -- as I said, begun in Panama. It was the first time we ever did it. And what we did was invite these people in, state by state. Sometimes we'd have two states, three states, depending on the size. Had their Senators there, and they were given a detailed briefing on the treaty -- Brzezinski, Brown, Warren Christopher, Cy Vance -- we brought in all the heavy guns to do the briefings.

And then the President came in at the end. Gave his pitch about the importance of the treaty, then answered questions from the group. And I think that probably was as significant a contribution to the successful adoption of the treaties as anything I can remember because it gave Senators, people, advocates back in the States who would speak out on behalf of the treaties. Very few people came here and listened to it who didn't walk away saying, "It's [all right]. We ought to do this thing." And so that developed -- then began to develop a constituency out in the States as well as these national constituency groups that we brought in and the figures, like Wayne. And I think we tried to get the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and we failed on that one.

But we got -- we pretty much -- we'd made a strategic decision then, both in the Senate and in the grassroots area that we were going to try to isolate this and make it a right-wing issue. The opposition would be all right wing. As soon as we had a break on the Hill with a moderate, we were going to be in big trouble, or out in the country with a moderate organization, say, the Chamber of Commerce, or somebody like that. And so we fought mightily to keep it isolated, and we did. And what we did was force the opposition leaders to be -- in the Senate to be Jesse Helms, Strom Thurmond, and Laxalt, all the right-wing, and nobody else who was moderate would stand up for them, and

anybody who wasn't moderate was on the side or kept themselves that way through the course of the fall when all the major [indiscernible] was taking place.

That, and then the other effort that we did in the Senate that I think was -- and this was before we had to go down and negotiate, I mean when we started to have to get votes, those were [indiscernible] individual issues [indiscernible] story.

But we decided that the best way to do this was to get Senators down in Panama, and Torrijos was a master salesman. People never understood this about this guy. They thought he was a swashbuckling, heavy-drinking dude that, you know, a roughneck that the Senators wouldn't like. Quite the contrary, he's a hell of a politician, which is not to say he wasn't a swashbuckling drinker, but he was a hell of a good guy and understood the importance of selling these guys on the importance of the treaty to Panama.

Two most important trips down were Byrd in the fall and Baker, and he was just [indiscernible] masterful. He knew that those two guys were key. He took them out in the countryside. They saw that he was a popular leader, Torrijos. And they went into little villages, and people came all around Torrijos, and he was considered the big -- you know, he was the main man in the country. And they went through the Canal and did all that (indiscernible) military briefings.

Incidentally, another critically important guy in all this was a guy by the name of [Lt. Gen. Dennis] McAuliffe, who was the general in charge of our military installation, our military contingent in Panama, who essentially now is the new commissioner under the treaty that calls for a director of the Panama Canal Commission, and the President named McAuliffe. Well, McAuliffe and some military boys did a hell of a job selling these guys on the importance of it strategically. The decision was made that we would argue that it was in the best strategic military interest of the United States that we go through these treaties. Otherwise, we're going to have to take forces away from other parts of the world to defend the Canal, and things would be blown up.

We always used to use that argument that one grenade would blow the Canal, and would close it down forever, or a glove dropped in the wrong place. Well, that was never really quite the truth. I mean it was -- you know, it'd take a pretty heavy piece of equipment to blow up that Canal, but nonetheless, it was the point of -- the vulnerability of it was clear.

The Senators came back with a clear understanding of the importance to the Panamanians of having it there. They all believed, I think, really in their heart of hearts that we would have a problem on our hands down there if we didn't ratify it, and most likely, it would be in a conflict that would require at least military force, and nobody wanted that. It would certainly probably close down the Canal. So we had a lot of things going for us except that we didn't have -- what the Senators didn't have was political [cover] yet. We still had not yet built up enough public support for the treaties because you couldn't take the average American citizen and explain to him that this was a -- go through all these great details as we did here at the White House, and they couldn't go to Panama and see it. Once you could spend time talking to people about it, you could always convince

somebody it was right. But in terms of mass communication, it was very difficult, plus we were confronted with a right-wing group putting out a film, the anti-SALT, anti-Panama film.

Incidentally, the right wing used their model on Panama to fight the SALT battle. They went out early on, and they borrowed some of our tactics. They went out early on and generated support and other things on SALT to stop the SALT treaties, but that's another subject.

In any event, the problem was that you had people like Ronald Reagan out saying, "You know, we bought it, we paid for it, we're going to keep it." It was very simplistic, and people were sort of feeling their own kind of -- it was post-Vietnam, a sense of reestablishing America's superiority in the world, and all that was there, a lot of which -- I think still brought Reagan into office.

So we had to fight back, and Senators had to fight it, particularly, so essentially what happened was that it was a job then of picking them off one by one. We developed -- by about mid-September or early October, and I had -- my vote counts would be in the files, but we were up to about 50 votes by the time -- by the end of -- by the middle of October. Baker and Byrd had come back. We had had -- we had a breather there for a while because Goldwater had indicated that he may support the treaties, which just shook the hell out of the right-wing, and he finally changed his mind after significant pressure from the ring-wing, but it took him some time to change his mind, and so that gave us even more breathing room. So we started to pick up votes, and people decided -- a lot of them decided, "I'm just going to get out of this damned thing early and take the heat now and not worry about it", which was the right thing to do, incidentally, although many of them argue [indiscernible] near the end. But he committed right away.

In fact, Moynihan sent a telegram to the President from wherever he was overseas in response to the President's telegram in August saying, "I'm with you. It's a wonderful idea, and anything I can do to help." Moynihan said after the fact, he said, "If I'd known what all these other guys were going to get for holding out, I probably wouldn't gotten endorsed [indiscernible]." But we had a lot of people who were [indiscernible] believed in it early on. That was our base, about 40. And I think of the Moynihans, the [indiscernible], the Kennedy's, you know, people like that were with us. I guess we [inaudible]. But most of them [indiscernible] Pat Leahy and other people were there.

And then we began to move into the moderate group of Senators, and they became to come over. Hollings publicly endorsed. Huddleston was there. And that gave these other guys a lot of cover, and they started to come in under the tent. Nunn took a little time to get [indiscernible]. Nunn held out a long time [inaudible].

But by the time the session came to a close in '77, we had, I think, about 50 votes when they went off on Christmas vacation. And we had fought mightily to get the ratification up that fall, and we wanted to do it and get it out of the way. We thought that if we had them bumped up across the Christmas recess, the debate -- the pressure to end the debate

in both would be there, and we thought if they were forced into a vote that we would have the votes ultimately, but we wanted to get it going. As long as the right wing had a chance to work on these guys, [indiscernible], we were on the offensive, which was very important.

We kept on the offensive the whole time. It was a hell of an operation. We had -- all went to the President's credit. He spent an enormous amount of time on it. He spent -- we used to bring -- whenever he wanted a Senator to see him, he'd see him automatically on Panama. He phoned -- Mrs. Carter would phone their wives, them. They were hit from every direction.

But the problem was, as with anything like that, when you go on that kind of major offensive, you're going to run out of steam, and we were on the offensive, and if we had to get past Christmas and try to fight it into the New Year, we were going to start to lose momentum. Well, in fact, Byrd said, "We can't bring it up, and we don't have the votes if we do." That was something that I'll never agree with Byrd on. I think that had we forced them into staying in to vote on it, it would've been won still, but Byrd had his way as usual, so it went over into the following year. And we -- at that point, we began to stall.

We had Byrd and Baker on board then, and they proposed what was known as the leadership amendments, which were a nice thing that people could vote on, essentially reaffirmed our right to protect the Canal, and that helped.

But by the time it got down to actually getting in a debate on the thing, they'd become old hat. And we stalled at about that point as we moved closer to -- I guess the vote was in March of '78 of the first treaty -- was it March, February? I can't remember exactly. But those were all in notes. Listen, I've got a substantial block of papers you all probably would want.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Sure.

BOB BECKEL: I had Sharon do a research job on Panama for me to get all my stuff together, so I've got some stuff I can give you.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Great.

BOB BECKEL: And it goes into some detail on this stuff. But so we'd run out of steam at that point, and we were just trying to nickel-and-dime to find Senators here and there. It was down then to -- the opposition had about -- we figured about 28 votes. We figured we had about 50 votes, or 55 votes, I guess it was. Yeah, because we were about 17 or 18 Senators at that point who were undecided. And the focus began to turn on those guys, and that made it worse because it was clear who the battle was being waged over. And these guys were under enormous pressure from both sides. At a point where we [indiscernible] our hand a little bit. Certainly, the right wing did in some of these cases. I remember a speech by the guy from Maine, Senator from Maine, who's -- Hatfield -- no,

Hathaway, who stood up on the floor, and he was under enormous pressure, and he said - and he was up for reelection. That was [indiscernible]. And he said, "I've taken about as much of the right-wing as I can take." He said, "I've gotten mailed to, I've gotten yelled at, I've got -- everything." He said, "I don't like their tactics. I don't believe in it, and it's not in the best interest of the country." So he gave a magnificent speech on the floor of the Senate that somebody ought to get to the President -- [indiscernible] nobody was there when he gave it. I was up in the galley just by luck. And he came along, so that was [indiscernible] the wrong way. We lost, I think, Wendell Ford despite the fact that Ford is not the guy who shows the greatest amount of guts in the Senate. But I thought we had Ford for a while, and Huddleston was working with Ford [and with the] Senior Senator from Kentucky. I guess [inaudible]. And we just pushed him right to the edge, and he finally just buckled under. Too much pressure from us and didn't have the guts to come out, and he just went the other way.

It began to narrow now. Now, the closer it was getting to the election, the Panamanians were getting -- were listening [indiscernible]. Byrd made a decision to allow the public radio to broadcast this thing, which was then subsequently broadcast in Panama -- big mistake. I mean these right-wingers stood up and called Panamanians everything from liars to communists to drug pushers. And then there's the whole story of -- I won't get into that in detail [indiscernible] enough time, but we had the whole issue at that point then of drugs.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Oh, yeah.

BOB BECKEL: And [indiscernible] kept in the fall when it was brewing.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Right.

BOB BECKEL: And the right-wing tried everything against us that they could find, and we had -- there were accusations about files being taken out of the Drug Enforcement Agency and the Justice Department, and that we took them away at night and hid them out, and there was a story that was written by UPI, which eventually Jody -- there's an interesting story. Ask Jody about -- [indiscernible] remember this story, but UPI ran a story. I spent a Saturday getting out of the DEA and Justice Department, oh, just hundreds of files on the drug issue. I mean this was [inaudible]. I think that was in the fall of '77. [Indiscernible]. Highly classified, highly sensitive stuff, and the President agreed when he was briefed on it, he wanted all the stuff sent to the Senate immediately to the Intelligence Committee. It was exactly the right decision to make. He brought Byrd and Baker and others down to the head of the Intelligence Committee and said, "Look, this thing's been raised. We're going to give you everything we've got."

We spent hours, days, going through all that stuff. And I can't remember the name of the lawyer. He's a lawyer at [Justice]. He was a Carter-appointee -- and I'll have that in my papers, too, but he and I did it -- and the story got out and UPI ran a story saying essentially that we'd taken the stuff, that [Attorney General Griffin] Bell had hidden stuff out in his safe at the Justice Department, we'd carried these files through Washington on

a weekend and had them destroyed, some destroyed, [indiscernible] but it would've been a devastating story had it run.

Well, fortunately, we got a hold of the story before it ran, and we got the first wire copy without, and Powell got the head of UPI and the two people who wrote the story [indiscernible] Capitol Hill. It was really a muckraking story, and we had one of the most hellacious arguments I've ever heard in Jody's office. I mean we did everything we could, and the lawyer, whoever he was, was going to sue him for slander. I mean, really, it was a serious threat. So I thought for a while that if these bastards ever got [indiscernible] my career was going to be ruined, and Powell was magnificent. He got them. And they were -- the first time I'd ever seen a wire service withdraw a story and had it rewritten and toned way down and all that.

So we had that issue going. We had a lot of other things going. And then began the hard negotiations, one on one, and it was -- they argued that we dealt -- that, you know, if anybody wanted a bridge, they wanted something else, we'd put it in their states.

I mean just for purposes of the President's own records, and you're never going to convince anybody otherwise, there really was very little of that that went on. We certainly made some decisions that helped the state where a Senator was undecided and we wanted to kind of look after. That's politics. There's nothing illegal about it, nothing immoral about it. It's gone on from time immemorial, but it wasn't as extensive, frankly, as a lot of people thought.

The interesting thing was that you couldn't get a vote by building a bridge. It was too big an issue politically. It had to go well beyond that. You know, you had some guys who held out for some things even though they were going to be with you anyway just so they knew [inaudible] so they got you to, you know, to make some concessions to them on other legislations. But the guys who it ultimately came down to near the end were just under such political pressure there was nothing you could do for them. Hell, it was simple to build bridges. Everybody needs a bridge, you know, but it wasn't that easy. It was much more complicated than that.

And so, finally, it came down to the last three or four days out, and when we — at this point, the DeConcini issue had been raised, when DeConcini came up with his amendment, which was anathema to the Panamanians. And we began negotiations with DeConcini. We made a mistake there, and I think we should [indiscernible] we didn't make it on the second; we learned from that. And that was that Christopher and I negotiated with DeConcini almost exclusively. We should've let the leadership in the Senate deal with him. The problem was that we needed him bad. Around his vote, there were easily three or four other votes. There was Hatfield of Montana, Nunn, and one or two others. I've got those in my notes, too, that I'll give you. But we negotiated with him, and there was nothing that he liked better than saying no to a president. I mean it gave him all kinds of publicity. And then all of a sudden, this unknown junior Senator from Arizona was the biggest news story around for four or five days.

And we went to the President again -- you can look at my notes for specific dates -- but we went to the President, Frank and Christopher and I, and met with him. And we were very blunt about it. Without DeConcini, we weren't going to have his votes; they weren't there. And this was about three days out. We were stalled at about -- we had 64 votes. The vote, I think, took place on a Tuesday, so we had -- on Friday, I think we had 64 votes. Maybe it was on Wednesday or Thursday; I can't remember. I remember that we had an agreement with Long that he would be the 67th vote, and Jennings Randolph said that he would be the -- no, [indiscernible] said he'd be the 66th. Jennings said he'd be the 67th if we needed him, but he didn't want to do it. He made it clear he did not want to do it because he was up for reelection that year, too, against Arch Moore. And we were stalled. No, I guess we had 63 votes, and we were waiting for -- DeConcini was critical because we were [indiscernible] about these other votes, plus we were waiting for Bellman and Brooke of Massachusetts. Now, that was surprising; out of everybody, Brooke was a holdout.

And so we had votes. We had the 66, 67 vote, but we didn't have the 63rd, fourth, or fifth. So we needed DeConcini, and we told him this. And the President agreed to meet with him and then he agreed to his terms, to the amendment.

Now, the Panamanians got really upset by that, and some of our own people here got very upset about it. In fact, there's a book out called *Foreign Policy and the Congress*, a new one this year, that talks about this whole issue, in which it's quoted an unnamed source at the White House saying that Christopher and Becker didn't know anything about Panama and they shouldn't have been negotiating this thing. And DeConcini -- because that almost blew the [indiscernible] the guy was quoted as saying he almost had a treaty between the President and the Senate and not between this administration and Panama.

But anyway, it was just a political [indiscernible]. We had to go ahead. Our theory was a treaty and a little fog was better than no treaty at all, from the Panamanian's standpoint, and they needed to get calmed down. So the President agreed and [indiscernible] DeConcini amendment. He came in and then that night, Bellman made a decision on his own merits to come along. It was one of the bravest decisions I've seen. He was magnificent. He was a Republican from Oklahoma.

And then Brooke came along and brought the meeting to the end, and so we had the votes, and then came the day for votes, and we counted 67 on the nose, and if we needed one extra, we'd get Jennings in the back of the room, Randolph. And then we took the vote. That was probably one of the best days this administration's had. We had [indiscernible] with the issue. I mean next to Camp David, obviously, but at that moment, we needed a boost, and we got the votes.

And surprisingly, [indiscernible; either Paul Laxalt or Howard Walter Cannon] of Nevada cast the 68th vote. Nobody expected it; we just counted it as lost. And what he said was the reason he did it, he didn't want any of his colleagues to be accused of being the 67th vote, which was interesting.

So anyway, here we had 68 votes, and Jennings Randolph never had to cast his vote. He said in back to the Senate, back to the -- hiding under the cloak of -- but some of the things that went on, I mean there were many stories about what happened during all that, but [Sen. James] Abourezk was holding out against us on some issue, and he was with us on the treaty on, and Culver had to get him out of a phone booth in the back in the cloak room, and [indiscernible] said he was going to vote no on the treaties, and Culver said, "Get your ass out of the phone booth and come out here and vote." He said, "Notice of Culvers." True story -- Culver took some paper towels that were there and shoved them underneath the phone booth, the door, and lit them, and he had had literally burned Abourezk out of the phone booth. And Culver was just a wonderful guy; [it's a sad lot][ph].

But anyway, so that was -- we got that, and then, of course, we went through the whole second treaty, which we thought, well, once we had the first treaty, the second one would be locked up. The first one was on the [trolley][ph] canal. Not the case. We had more amendments there and we had all kinds of things that went on. But [indiscernible]. I have not refreshed myself on the second treaty. [Inaudible]. That was probably too much, more than you wanted.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Oh, no, no, that's great. Let me touch on a couple things. Can you suggest who the unknown White House source might be?

BOB BECKEL: Yeah, it's Bob Pastor, NSC.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Okay. How about Jerry Ford? You know, was there anything special bring him around?

BOB BECKEL: Yeah, there was, and he was important. The President did that himself. We went after everybody we could go after. The President took -- he met with Ford. I'll tell you how we got to Ford. It was interesting. Kissinger was earlier an important -- as much as I don't like Henry Kissinger, he helped us on this one, and he was instrumental. He and Brent Scowcroft were instrumental in going to Ford first. The decision was that you had to get -- the President couldn't go directly to Ford, and so we sent people out to brief Ford on it, and we kept him up to date the whole time. And then we got Kissinger to spend time with Ford working on him on it, and then the President asked him, and he came on board. He didn't make a lot of it. He was -- he understood the importance of it.

We went after Nixon, sent people out to brief Nixon, and interestingly enough, we went out, too, after Reagan, and David Aaron flew out to brief Reagan, I think. And, of course, Reagan gave some statement [inaudible].

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Came out with his TV message against it.

BOB BECKEL: Yeah, that's right. That's right. He was in that [inaudible].

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Okay, let's see. I'd like to come back and talk at length about all of these things at your convenience.

I'd love to take a few more minutes of your time and possibly just touch on all the other things you worked on. You know, you can just list them.

BOB BECKEL: All right. Well, SALT -- SALT II was, in terms of dimensions of the issue, was the second-biggest issue that I worked on. I consider second biggest because we never finished it, and Panama we did.

The Mideast arms sales package, which was probably the most controversial and political issue that we dealt with next to Panama, and that was selling jet fighters to the Saudis, F-15s, and there was -- we'd already agreed to sell F-5s to Egypt, and Israel was due 15s. And it was violently -- the idea of selling to the Saudis was violently opposed by the Jewish community in the United States. And it was one of the first serious breaks we had in the Jewish community. The President already [indiscernible] being from the South. We had lukewarm support during the campaign, but this one really caused some deep ruptures, and it was held back [inaudible] --

DAVID ALSOBROOK: [Inaudible].

BOB BECKEL: So the Mideast arm sales package.

The Turkish arms embargo issue, which was also another -- and in all positions, incidentally, we did all the same kind of -- the Panama model was used, the briefings down here and all that. The Turkish arms embargo was -- ranks right up among one of the more emotional issues. The Greek community here in this country was just violent on it, and that whole subject was -- here's another example. Carter [indiscernible] important to do it and lost support as a result.

Those were the major foreign policy initiatives that I did that were separate from the normal foreign policy issues, and I handled foreign aid every year. It was probably the most difficult thing I've ever done. I mean you never can -- foreign aid is like taking the back flight up Capitol Hill. Unfortunately, it just doesn't sell. And the President was very committed to foreign aid, in fact, increased foreign aid substantially.

I was involved in the battle to keep Peace Corps and ACTION, which was a major effort to separate it out by friends of Peace Corps and break up ACTION, but the President decided not to do that, rightfully so, because it would've meant that other agencies in ACTION -- VISTA and seniors -- the senior citizen program -- would've been put into bureaucracies around, so he wanted to save them. That was a major battle.

We had all the defense appropriations bills in opposition because we overturned them. We always had a good defense budget, but [indiscernible] increase it, and we'd have to -- they always made it seem like we were opposed to it, which wasn't the case at all.

The other major issue that I did, and I remember we put an enormous amount of time on - the President did, too -- was on the nuclear carrier, and there was just a major fight over that. I think in almost all these things, we only won by two or three votes in each one of them, but they were -- they had inserted a nuclear carrier in the defense budget. It was a two billion dollar fiasco. We had a major fight over that.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: The water projects -- did you --?

BOB BECKEL: No, I never touched that. I was always on foreign policy defense.

The other thing I did was deal with the intelligence committees on various things dealing with SALT and Panama, and among other things, Jonestown, Jonestown Massacre, which the Congress investigated. Was involved in that.

And then any other range of foreign policy issues that we had [indiscernible] Peace Corps and ACTION appropriations.

My job was to coordinate -- when we finally began to establish what the role of this position was in the government, I guess the best way to sum it up is that there are a number of agencies which have Congressional relations operations -- Defense, State, CIA, ACTION -- that all feed from the same trough up on the Hill. Most foreign policy or foreign affairs committees have the Defense Committee, the Intelligence Committee, and there was never a coordinating mechanism for Congressional relations on that, so we decided we'd do that using the White House as a focal point in this position that I've got, which I hope they'll continue because it's an important coordinating mechanism. And so anything involving any of those agencies or aid, I would do the coordination on behalf of the administration, usually a group of -- meeting weekly with a group of the senior Congressional people to each one of those aids.

[Side 2]

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Did that pretty well cover the boundaries of your involvement?

BOB BECKEL: Yeah, I think that's [inaudible].

DAVID ALSOBROOK: So -- and we can come back and we could really get into those details in the months and years to come if I had a chance to [reflect those]. And, finally, you know, I mentioned that I read in the *Post* this morning you're going back to Texas.

BOB BECKEL: Yeah.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Could you briefly tell me a little bit about what you're going to be doing?

BOB BECKEL: I'm going to go to Texas and start a -- I used to be in the political consultant advertising business, and now I'm going to go back and start a communications company, political advertising, commercial advertising, cable television. And I'll be living in Texas for the next -- I'll plan to stay there for two years and do a -- and then leave the business behind as a source of income so I can come back into politics. I call this the occupation period now, and I'm going to be out of town for the occupation. I will leave my house here.

I've got two places where I can be reached -- at 609 G Street Southeast, D.C., 20003 is my Washington address; and in Texas, I'll be in Austin, Texas, and I'll be listed in the book. I don't have an address yet, but they'll have me -- I can be reached there, and I'll plan to put my name in the directory. But the person -- my lawyers in Austin, which would be the place to reach me --

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Okay.

BOB BECKEL: -- is the law firm of Ray, Wood, and Henderson in Austin, Texas, and they're listed, and Don Ray is my attorney there.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: Okay. Say if we wanted to get a hold of you, say, five years from now, is there an alumni association that would probably know where you went?

BOB BECKEL: Yeah, you can usually find me. My college keeps track of me pretty well, Wagner College in Staten Island, New York, and my attorney, David [indiscernible], has a listing of where I'll be.

DAVID ALSOBROOK: That's great. Okay, well, we'll be talking with you some more.

BOB BECKEL: Great.